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2 Senators Promise to Insist on Truth From C.I.A.

By STEPHEN ENGELBERG*Special to The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, March 5 — Two members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today that they would insist that the man nominated to be the new Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency tell the panel when it has been misled by any agency official, including the Director.

John N. McMahon, who resigned Tuesday as Deputy Director, agreed to the same arrangement nearly four years ago at his confirmation hearing. He said he would feel a personal and professional responsibility to "correct the record," regardless of who had testified inaccurately before Congress. The promise came in response to questioning by members of the committee.

Today, Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, vice chairman of the intelligence committee, and Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, a committee member, said they would ask Robert M. Gates, named as Mr. McMahon's replacement, to provide the same assurances.

The White House said Tuesday that Mr. McMahon would resign effective March 29 for "personal reasons" and it said President Reagan planned to nominate Mr. Gates, who is now the agency's director for intelligence. In this job he supervises the agency's analysts, who interpret intelligence information.

The Senate and House intelligence committees oversee the C.I.A.'s activities and they depend largely on classified briefings by the agency. In the tenure of William J. Casey as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, there have been several instances in which members of the committee felt that Mr. Casey or other agency officials had been incomplete or misleading in their presentations.

Senator Cohen said: "John McMahon has enjoyed the reputation that when he is called upon to testify he is very straight with the committee. I

believe Mr. Gates is of the same caliber and to the extent that he is now part of operations, we would expect the same thing and I think we'll get it. We can't do our jobs if we're not getting accurate information."

The Senate confirmation hearing for Mr. Gates has not yet been scheduled. Mr. Cohen predicted that Mr. Gates would easily win Senate approval, calling him "highly thought of." The hearing will be the committee's first public session since December of 1983.

Senator Cohen said the hearing would be an opportunity to explore the nominee's views on covert operations, the role of Congressional oversight and the future direction of the agency.

The issue of covert operations has proved a sensitive one in the Reagan Administration. Under Mr. Casey, the agency has expanded its role in major

covert efforts to support insurgencies in Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan. Administration officials say that Mr. McMahon sometimes expressed doubts about these efforts when the plans were being formulated. They said, however, that he was a "team player" once a decision was reached.

These officials said there was no evidence that Mr. McMahon's resignation came as a result of any particular policy dispute.

'Someone Was Raising Questions'

Several members of the committee said that they shared Mr. McMahon's doubts about large-scale covert actions. They said his role in questioning, and sometimes blunting, Central Intelligence Agency proposals was viewed by the committee one of his most positive contributions to the agency.

"Members of the committee felt that someone was raising questions before things got to us," said Senator Cohen. "If that is absent in the future, it may intensify the role of the committee, which would not necessarily be a good thing."

According to biographical information provided by the C.I.A., Mr. Gates joined the agency in 1966, one year after receiving his bachelor's degree from the College of William & Mary. He earned a doctorate in Russian and Soviet History from Georgetown University in 1974. He began working for the National Security Council Staff the same year, and he remained to serve Presidents Ford and Carter before returning to the C.I.A. in 1979. In 1982, he assumed his job as director for intelligence.